Understanding the Implications of Racial Disparities in Social Security Administration Field Office Access

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This project will study the locations of Social Security Administration field offices in terms of the racial composition of the surrounding areas. We will then examine the implications of any disparities in terms of application rates. Recent work shows that field office closings lead to large reductions in disability insurance applications for that area (Deshpande and Li, 2019) and summary statistics in that paper suggest that the share of the population that is Black predicts field office closings. These results imply that field office closings may disproportionately burden potential Black applicants. We will study overall access to local field offices by race and estimate the impact of any disparities on applications rates and local labor market outcomes.

This project addresses the SSA's focal area of studying racial disparities and structural barriers that might contribute to disparate outcomes. In this case, the concern is that social insurance systems may be more difficult to access for certain racial groups, exacerbating the impacts of existing labor market disparities since components of the social safety net are less available. We will quantify the importance of differences in access.